

April 22, 2010, Earth Day
by Congressman John Linder (R-GA)

This coming week, we recognize Earth Day. In thinking about the issues currently facing our planet, the country's impending shortage of clean, affordable water has been weighing on my mind. In fact, water related issues have been of interest to me for many years. Thirty years ago, I wrote an article that predicted that one of the 2 major challenges for our country in the next century would be providing enough fresh water for our booming population.

Indeed today, Americans are faced with major droughts, legacy infrastructure, and outdated information. Water scarcity affects everything from global food security and the growth of cities, to the location of jobs and industries and, I believe, prospects for peace in the Middle East. Peace can *never* happen in places such as the Middle East until their citizens' most basic human need—clean water—is met. We can't solve the whole world's water problems. As we are well aware, we're having a hard enough time dealing with the water shortages in Georgia.

Since 2001, I have been calling for the creation of a Federal commission to examine our nation's water issues in order to prevent future crises like the one we are facing in the Southeast part of the country right now. The establishment of such a commission is a necessary and good first step toward solving our nation's water problems, and I am more than ready to take great strides in the direction of a real, workable solution.

The idea of such a commission is not bold or new. In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson signed the "National Water Commission Act" (P.L. 90-515) into law. This bill authorized the President to appoint seven members to the Commission, who were charged with reviewing anticipated water resources problems and identifying alternative ways of meeting future requirements, by providing advice on specific water problems raised by the President. The Commission was given five years to carry out its duties and prepare a final report for Congress.

The Commission conveyed more than 200 recommendations for improving national water policy to Congress in 1973. Its final report would certainly provide some useful information for the creation of a comprehensive water policy today; however, it is critical that a more current assessment be done to supplement the 1973 findings.

It is now 37 years since the National Water Commission issued its report, and we are facing a greater crisis than we did in the 1970's. Experts estimate that older cities lose approximately 20 percent of the water carried through their pipes each day. New York City loses 36 million gallons per day to leaks in the Delaware Aqueduct, while Philadelphia loses 85 million gallons per day to leaks in city pipes. According to experts at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), by 2016, over half of our nation's pipes will be in very poor condition, if not completely unusable. If we wait another 5 or 10 years to get serious about solving these problems, it will be too late. That is why I introduced legislation in the 107th, 108th, 109th, 110th and 111th Congresses to create the "21st Century Water Commission."

The 21st Century Water Commission will attempt to solve these problems by projecting future water supply and demand, studying current water management programs, and consulting with representatives of Federal, state, local agencies, and private water management entities, to develop recommendations for a comprehensive water strategy.

There are a number of proposals that have been put forth by the government and the private sector in recent years that attempt to address our nation's water issues. While many of the ideas put forth are, indeed, good ideas, many of them tend to address our nation's ongoing water issues in an ad-hoc fashion. The 21st Century Water Commission created by my bill is specifically designed to consider and address the issue from a comprehensive viewpoint, and not a piecemeal effort as many of the other proposals do.

The oil crisis of the late 20th century is paling in comparison to the water crisis of the 21st century. Providing all Americans with fresh water is a matter of life and death, and I hope that Congress will act expeditiously to support my objective.

In addition to recognizing Earth Day I would also like to recognize the upcoming three-year anniversary of the founding of the House Water Caucus. As a founder and Co-Chair of the Caucus, I have highlighted the importance of ensuring an adequate and dependable fresh water supply for all Americans throughout the 21st Century, and will continue to do so. It is my wish for this Earth Day that Americans will never face a time when they turn on their faucets and are left high and dry.